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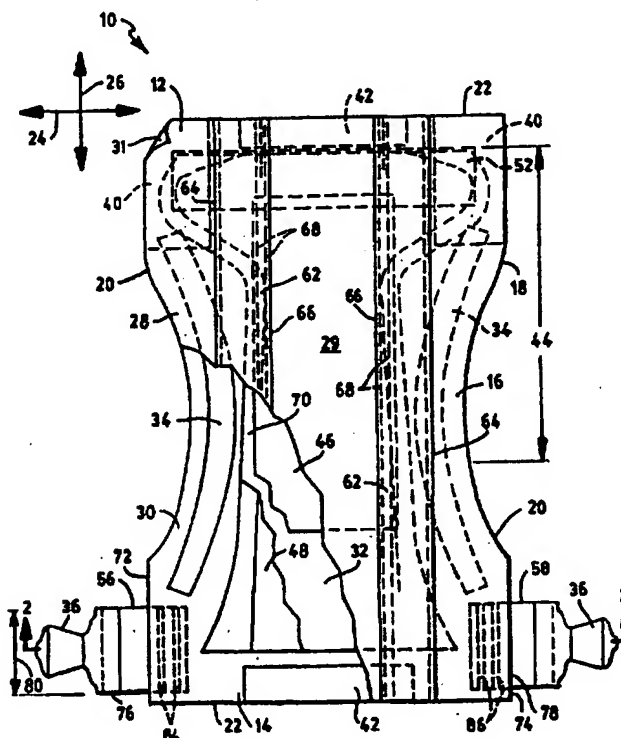
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(71) Applicant: KIMBERLY-CLARK WORLDWIDE, INC. [US/US]; 401 North Lake Street, Neenah, WI 54957-0349 (US).			
(72) Inventors: LEAK, Allen, Todd ; 1118 Park Village Drive, Neenah, WI 54956 (US). SUPRISE, Jody, Dorothy ; 113 Harrison Street, Neenah, WI 54956 (US). ZACHARIAS, Duane, Kenneth ; 950 Baldwin Street, Neenah, WI 54956 (US).			
(74) Agents: MIELKE, Thomas, J. et al. ; Kimberly-Clark Worldwide, Inc., 401 North Lake Street, Neenah, WI 54957-0349 (US).		<p>Published</p> <p><i>With international search report.</i></p> <p><i>Before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of the receipt of amendments.</i></p>	

(54) Title: DISPOSABLE ABSORBENT ARTICLE POSSESSING IMPROVED FIT

(57) Abstract

A disposable absorbent article including a backsheet layer, a liquid permeable topsheet layer superposed on said backsheet layer and an absorbent body located between the topsheet layer and the backsheet layer. The absorbent article further includes elasticized side panels located at each laterally opposed end region of at least one of said front and rear waistband sections. The article includes fastening means for securing the article on a wearer by forming overlapped portions. A tackified area is located in at least one of the overlapped portions. The tackified area comprises a tackifying agent providing a coefficient of friction for the overlapped portions of less than about 350 grams. The tackified areas serve to maintain the relative positions of the portions of the disposable absorbent article forming the overlapped portions.



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DISPOSABLE ABSORBENT ARTICLE POSSESSING IMPROVED FIT

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a disposable absorbent article. Specifically, the
5 invention relates to an absorbent article having elasticized side panels and tackified
areas which provide improved fit and performance attributes.

Background of the Invention

Conventional absorbent articles, such as disposable diapers, have been constructed with
10 elasticized side panels. The presence of such elasticized side panels has been found to
improve the fit and performance of disposable absorbent articles. Nonetheless,
absorbent articles employing elasticized side panels have not been completely
satisfactory when subjected to high loadings of liquid. As a result, there has remained a
continuing need for absorbent articles that can provide improved comfort and fit and
15 increased resistance to leakage.

Brief Description of the Invention

The present invention provides a disposable absorbent article having a front waistband
section, a rear waistband section, and an intermediate section which interconnects the
20 front and rear waistband sections. The article comprises a backsheet layer, a liquid
permeable topsheet layer having an outer surface and being superposed on said
backsheet layer, and an absorbent body located between said topsheet layer and said
backsheet layer. The disposable absorbent article further includes an elasticized side
panel located at each laterally opposed end region of at least one of said front and rear
25 waistband sections. The diaper also includes fastening means for securing the article on
a wearer by forming overlapped portions. The fastening means are connected to at least
one of the side panels. The absorbent article also includes a tackified area in at least
one of the overlapped portions. The tackified area comprises a tackifying agent
providing a coefficient of friction for the overlapped portions of less than about

350 grams. In one preferred embodiment the side panels are constructed to be elastically stretchable at least along a lateral, cross-direction of said article.

Brief Description of the Drawings

5 The invention will be more fully understood and further advantages will become apparent when reference is made to the following detailed description of the accompanying drawings in which:

10 Fig. 1 representatively shows a partial cut-away, top view of an article of the present invention;

Fig. 2 representatively shows a schematic, lateral cross-sectional view taken through Section 2-2 of Fig. 1;

15 Fig. 3 representatively shows a partially cut-away, top view of an alternative embodiment of an article of the present invention; and

20 Fig. 4 representatively shows a schematic, lateral cross-sectional view taken through section 4-4 of Fig. 3.

Detailed Description of the Invention

The structures of the present invention will be described herein in relationship to their use in disposable absorbent articles, but it should be understood that potential uses of the structures of the present invention need not be limited to disposable absorbent articles.

25 As used herein, the term "disposable absorbent article" refers to articles which absorb and contain body exudates and are intended to be discarded after a limited period of use. The articles are not intended to be laundered or otherwise restored for reuse. The articles can be placed against or in proximity to the body of the wearer to absorb and contain various exudates discharged from the body. While the present description will
30 particularly be made in the context of a diaper article, it should be understood that the present invention is also applicable to other disposable personal care absorbent articles, such as adult incontinence garments, sanitary napkins, children's training pants and the like.

With reference to Figs. 1 and 2, an absorbent article, such as diaper 10, has a cross-wise, lateral dimension 24 and a length-wise, longitudinal dimension 26. The representative diaper 10, has a front waistband section 12, a rear or back waistband section 14, and an intermediate section 16 which interconnects the front and rear waistband sections. The article includes a backsheet layer 30 having a laterally extending width and a longitudinally extending length. A porous, liquid permeable topsheet layer 28 has a laterally extending width and a longitudinally extending length, and is superposed on the backsheet layer 30. An absorbent structure, such as absorbent body 32 is located between the backsheet layer 30 and the topsheet layer 28.

10 An elasticized side panel 56 and 58 is located at each laterally opposed end region 72 and 74 of at least one of the front and rear waistband sections. The side panels 56, 58 are, in the shown embodiment, constructed to be elastically stretchable at least along a laterally extending cross-direction 24 of the article. A fastening means, such as provided by tape tab fasteners 36, is provided for securing the article on a wearer by forming overlapped portions. The fastening means connect to a laterally distal end region 76 and/or 78 of at least one of the side panels 56 and 58. In the illustrated embodiment, for example, a first tape tab fastener 36 is connected to the distal end region 76 of side panel 56, and a second tape tab fastener is connected to the distal end region 78 of elasticized side panel 58.

20 The diaper 10 further includes a tackified area 40 in at least one of the overlapped portions formed during use of diaper 10. The tackified area 40 comprises a tackifying agent.

25 Fig. 1 is a representative plan view of diaper 10 of the present invention in its flat-out, uncontracted state (i.e., with all elastic induced gathering and contraction removed). Portions of the structure are partially cut away to more clearly show the interior construction of diaper 10, and the surface of the diaper which contacts the wearer is facing the viewer. In the shown embodiment, diaper 10 has a front waistband region 12, a back waistband region 14, an intermediate crotch region 16 which interconnects the front and rear waistband regions. The outer edges of the diaper define a periphery 18 in which the longitudinally extending side edge margins are designated 20 and the laterally extending end edge margins are designated 22. The side edges define leg openings for the diaper, and optionally, are curvilinear and contoured. The end edges are shown as

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straight, but optionally, may be curvilinear. The diaper additionally has a transversely extending, lateral width dimension 24 and a longitudinal, length dimension 26.

Diaper 10 typically includes a porous, liquid permeable topsheet 28 having an outer
5 surface 29, a portion of which may contact the body of a wearer during use; a
substantially liquid impermeable backsheet 30 having an outer surface 31; an absorbent
structure 32, positioned between the topsheet and backsheet; a surge management
portion 46; and elastic members, such as leg elastics 34 and waist elastics 42. The
surge management portion is positioned in liquid communication with the absorbent
10 structure, and the absorbent structure includes a retention portion 48. Topsheet 28,
backsheet 30, absorbent structure 32, surge management portion 46 and the elastic
members 34 and 42 may be assembled in a variety of well-known diaper configurations.
In addition, the illustrated diaper includes a system of containment flaps 62, and a
system of elasticized side panel members 56 and 58.

15 As representatively shown, topsheet 28 and backsheet 30 may be generally coextensive,
and may have length and width dimensions which are generally larger than the
corresponding dimensions of absorbent structure 32. Topsheet 28 is associated with
and superimposed on backsheet 30, thereby defining the periphery 18 of diaper 10. The
20 periphery delimits the outer perimeter of the diaper 10, and in the illustrated embodiment,
comprises laterally marginal end edges 22, and contoured longitudinally extending
marginal side edges 20. The diaper 10 has front and back waistband regions 12 and 14,
respectively, extending from the laterally extending end edges 22 of diaper periphery 18
toward the transverse center line of the diaper. The waistband regions comprise those
25 upper portions of diaper 10, which when worn, wholly or partially cover or encircle the
waist or mid-lower torso of the wearer. The intermediate, crotch region 16 lies between
and interconnects waistband regions 12 and 14, and comprises that portion of diaper 10
which, when worn, is positioned between the legs of the wearer and covers the lower
torso of the wearer. Thus, the crotch region 16 is an area where repeated fluid surge
30 typically occur in the diaper or other disposable absorbent article.

Topsheet 28 presents a body-facing surface (outer surface 29) which is compliant,
soft-feeling, and non-irritating to the wearer's skin. Further, topsheet 28 can be less
hydrophilic than retention portion 48, and is sufficiently porous to be liquid permeable,
35 permitting liquid to penetrate through its thickness.

A suitable topsheet 28 may be manufactured from a wide selection of web materials, such as porous foams, reticulated foams, apertured plastic films, natural fibers (for example, wood or cotton fibers), synthetic fibers (for example, polyester or polypropylene fibers), or a combination of natural and synthetic fibers. Topsheet 28 is typically employed to help isolate the wearer's skin from liquids held in absorbent structure 32. Various woven and nonwoven fabrics can be used for topsheet 28. For example, the topsheet may be composed of a meltblown or spunbonded web of polyolefin fibers. The topsheet may also be a bonded-carded-web composed of natural and/or synthetic fibers.

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For the purposes of the present description, the term "nonwoven web" means a web of material which is formed without the aid of a textile weaving or knitting process. The term "fabrics" is used to refer to all of the woven, knitted and nonwoven fibrous webs.

15 The topsheet fabrics may be composed of a substantially hydrophobic and substantially nonwetable material, and the hydrophobic material may optionally be treated with a surfactant or otherwise processed to impart a desired level of wettability and hydrophilicity. In a particular embodiment of the invention, topsheet 28 can be a nonwoven, spunbond polypropylene fabric composed of about 2.8-3.2 denier fibers
20 formed into a web having a basis weight of about 22 grams per square meter (gsm) and density of about 0.06 grams per cubic centimeter (gm/cc). The fabric can be surface treated with a selected amount of surfactant, such as about 0.28% Triton X-102 surfactant. The surfactant can be applied by any conventional means, such as spraying, printing, brush coating or the like.

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The surfactant material, such as a conventional wetting agent, can be applied to a medial section of the topsheet layer 28 to provide a greater wettability of the medial section, as compared to a remainder of the topsheet layer 28. In particular configurations, the cross-directional width of the medial section can be substantially equal to or less than the
30 cross-directional width of the surge management portion 46. In alternative configurations, the medial section width can be substantially equal to or less than a cross-directional spacing between a pair of adhesive strips employed to secure the containment flaps 62 onto topsheet 28 and to form a leak resistant barrier seal onto the backsheet 30.

The surfactant-treated medial section can be approximately centered with respect to the longitudinal centerline of the diaper, and can extend along substantially the entire length of the topsheet layer. Alternatively, the surfactant treated medial section can be constructed to extend along only a predetermined portion of the topsheet length.

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The various configurations of the invention can include elasticized containment flaps 62. The shown configurations, for example, include two containment flaps 62 which are connected to the bodyside surface of topsheet layer 28. Suitable constructions and arrangements for containment flaps 62 are described, for example, in U.S. Patent
10 4,704,116 issued November 3, 1987, to K. Enloe, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference in a manner that is consistent (not contradictory) herewith. Other configurations of the containment flaps 62 are described in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 208,816 of R. Everett et al., filed March 4, 1994 and entitled ABSORBENT ARTICLE HAVING AN IMPROVED SURGE MANAGEMENT (Attorney docket
15 No. 11,375), the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference in a manner that is consistent herewith.

Such containment flaps can be attached to topsheet layer 28 along length-wise extending fixed regions, such as fixed edges 64, of the flaps. A movable edge 66 of
20 each containment flap includes a flap elastic member 68 comprising one or more individual strands of elastomeric material. For example, a plurality of elastic strands may be configured in a spatially separated, generally parallel arrangement, and a suitable elastic strand can, for example, be composed of a 470 decitex Lycra elastomer. Elastic member 68 is connected to the movable edge of the containment flap in an elastically
25 contractible condition such that the contraction of the elastic components thereof gathers and shortens the edge of the containment flap. As a result, the movable edge of each containment flap tends to position itself in a spaced relation away from the bodyside surfaces of topsheet 28 and/or surge management portion 46 toward a generally upright and approximately perpendicular configuration, especially in the crotch section of the
30 diaper. In the shown embodiment, for example, the moveable edge of the barrier flap is connected to the flap elastics by partially doubling the flap material back upon itself by a limited amount which is sufficient to enclose flap elastics 68.

The containment flaps may, for example, be constructed of a fibrous material which is
35 similar to the material comprising topsheet 28, or similar to the material comprising surge

management portion 46. Other conventional materials, such as polymer films, may also be employed. In other aspects of the invention, barrier flaps 62 are constructed of a material which is permeable to gas, such as ambient air. Alternative configurations of the invention can include barrier flaps which are constructed of a material which is resistant to a passage of aqueous liquid, such as urine, therethrough. For example, barrier flaps 62 may be constructed of a spunbond-meltblown-spunbond (SMS) laminate material. In the illustrated embodiment, for example, the barrier flaps can be constructed of a SMS material having a basis weight of about 0.85 osy ounce per square yard (about 28 gsm). The spunbond layers are composed of polypropylene fibers, and the meltblown layer is composed of meltblown polypropylene fibers.

In the various configurations of the invention, such as where the barrier flaps 62 are configured to be permeable to gas while having a resistance and limited permeability to aqueous liquid, the liquid resistant material can have a construction which is capable of supporting a hydrohead of at least about 45 centimeters of water substantially without leakage therethrough. A suitable technique for determining the resistance of a material to liquid penetration is Federal Test Method Standard FTMS 191 Method 5514, dated 31 December 1968.

With reference to Fig. 2, each of the barrier flaps 62 can include a laterally extending base section 116 thereof with at least a portion of the base section attached to the topsheet layer 28 at a topsheet securement section 118, which is located laterally outboard of the retention portion 48 and laterally outboard of the surge management portion 46. The topsheet securement section 118 of topsheet layer 28 is operably sealed to the backsheet layer 30 to substantially prevent or block a leakage of liquid through the securement section 118. The securement section can be constructed by employing various conventional techniques, such as adhesive bonding, thermal bonding, sonic bonding, stitching, stapling, or the like. The illustrated embodiment, for example, is configured with the topsheet securement section 118 sealed to the backsheet layer 30 with a substantially continuous adhesive bead or strip 120 composed of a pressure-sensitive, hot melt adhesive.

The adhesive strip can advantageously provide a barrier bead which extends generally length-wise of the diaper, and at least a portion of the barrier bead is located in the diaper crotch region 16. The crotch portion of the barrier bead can be constructed to

operably bond and substantially seal the corresponding portion of the securement section 118 of topsheet layer 28 to both the barrier flap base section 116 and the backsheet layer 30 by effectively "bleeding" through the topsheet layer 28 to make operable contact with the backsheet layer. When a substantially continuous seal is provided, liquid can be more effectively contained between the two flaps 62. The
5 representative adhesive strip 120 is wiped or otherwise applied onto the appointed section of the flap base 116 at a position which interposes the strip between the terminal side edge of tissue wrap 70 and the leg elastic carrier sheet. Additional pressure can be applied to the adhesive strip area to help assure a desired seal.

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At least a portion of the base section can also be attached to the topsheet layer 28 along a topsheet seam section located along the fixed edge 64 of the containment flap. A suitable connecting means, such as a substantially continuous adhesive bead, operably secures the fixed barrier flap edge to the topsheet seam section.

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Backsheet 30 may be composed of a liquid permeable material, but preferably comprises a material which is configured to be substantially impermeable to liquids. For example, a typical backsheet can be manufactured from a thin plastic film, or other flexible liquid-impermeable material. As used in the present specification, the term "flexible"

20 refers to materials which are compliant and which will readily conform to the general shape and contours of the wearer's body. Backsheet 30 can help prevent the exudates contained in absorbent structure 32 from wetting articles such as bedsheets and overgarments which contact diaper 10.

25 In particular embodiments of the invention, backsheet 30 is a polyethylene film having a thickness of from about 0.012 millimeters (0.5 mil) to about 0.051 millimeters (2.0 mils). In the shown embodiment, the backsheet is a film having a thickness of about 0.038 millimeter (1.25 mil). Alternative constructions of the backsheet may comprise a woven or non-woven fibrous web layer which has been totally or partially constructed or
30 treated to impart the desired levels of liquid impermeability to selected regions that are adjacent or proximate the absorbent body. Backsheet 30 typically provides the outer cover of the article. Optionally, however, the article may comprise a separate outer cover member which is in addition to the backsheet.

Backsheet 30 may optionally be composed of a micro-porous, "breathable" material which permits vapors to escape from absorbent structure 32 while still preventing liquid exudates from passing through the backsheet. For example, the breathable backsheet may be composed of a microporous polymer film or a nonwoven fabric which has been coated or otherwise treated to impart a desired level of liquid impermeability. For example, a suitable microporous film is a PMP-1 material, which is available from Mitsui Toatsu Chemicals, Inc., a company having offices in Tokyo, Japan; or an XKO-8044 polyolefin film available from 3M Company of Minneapolis, Minnesota. The backsheet can also be embossed or otherwise be provided with a matte finish to exhibit a more aesthetically pleasing appearance.

The size of backsheet 30 is typically determined by the size of absorbent structure 32 and the exact diaper design selected. Backsheet 30, for example, may have a generally T-shape, a generally I-shape or a modified hourglass shape, and may extend beyond the terminal edges of absorbent structure 32 by a selected distance, such as a distance within the range of about 1.3 centimeters to 2.5 centimeters (about 0.5 to 1.0 inch), to provide side margins.

Topsheet 28 and backsheet 30 are connected or otherwise associated together in an operable manner. As used therein, the term "associated" encompasses configurations in which topsheet 28 is directly joined to backsheet 30 by affixing topsheet 28 directly to backsheet 30, and configurations wherein topsheet 28 is joined to backsheet 30 by affixing topsheet 28 to intermediate members which in turn are affixed to backsheet 30. Topsheet 28 and backsheet 30 can be affixed directly to each other in the diaper periphery 18 by attachment means (not shown) such as an adhesive, sonic bonds, thermal bonds or any other attachment means known in the art. For example, a uniform continuous layer of adhesive, a patterned layer of adhesive, a sprayed pattern of adhesive or an array of separate lines, swirls or spots of construction adhesive may be used to affix topsheet 28 to backsheet 30.

It should be readily appreciated that the above-described attachment means may also be employed to interconnect and assemble together the various other component parts of the article described herein.

In the representatively shown embodiment of the invention, the topsheet layer 28 is disposed and secured in facing relation with the backsheet layer 30 to retain and hold the retention portion 48 and the surge management 46 between the backsheet layer and the topsheet layer. The marginal side regions of topsheet layer 28 are operably connected to corresponding marginal side regions of the backsheet layer 30. Each of the attached marginal side regions of the topsheet and backsheet layers is located laterally outboard of its corresponding, associated side edge region of the surge management portion 46. In particular configurations of the invention, the attached marginal regions of topsheet 28 can include marginal end regions. The attached marginal end regions are located longitudinally outboard of the end edge regions of the retention portion 48 and/or surge management portion 46. Similarly, the attached marginal regions of backsheet 30 can include attached marginal end regions, which can be located longitudinally outboard of the end edge regions of the retention portion and/or surge management portion.

Elastic members 34 are disposed adjacent the periphery 18 of diaper 10 along each of the longitudinal side edges 20. The leg elastic members 34 can be connected to either or both of the topsheet and backsheet layers to provide elasticized side margins of the diaper article, and can be arranged to draw and hold diaper 10 against the legs of the wearer. Waist elastic members 42 may also be disposed adjacent either or both of the end edges of diaper 10 to provide elasticized waistbands.

Elastic members 34 and 42 are secured to diaper 10 in an elastically contractible condition so that in a normal under strain configuration, the elastic members effectively contract against diaper 10. The elastic members can be secured in an elastically contractible condition in at least two ways, for example, the elastic members may be stretched and secured while diaper 10 is in an uncontracted condition. Alternatively, diaper 10 may be contracted, for example, by pleating, and the elastic members secured and connected to diaper 10 while the elastic members are in their unrelaxed or unstretched condition. Still other means, such as heat-shrink elastic material, may be used to gather the garment.

In the embodiment illustrated in Fig. 1, leg elastic members 34 extend essentially along the complete length of crotch region 16 of diaper 10. Alternatively, elastic members 34 may extend the entire length of diaper 10, or any other length suitable providing the arrangement of elastically contractible lines desired for the particular diaper design.

Elastic members 34 and 42 may have any of a multitude of configurations. For example, the width of the individual elastic members 34 may be varied from 0.25 millimeters (0.01 inches) to 25 millimeters (1.0 inch) or more. The elastic members may comprise a single strand of elastic material, or may comprise several parallel or non-parallel strands of elastic material, or may be applied in a rectilinear or curvilinear arrangement. Where the strands are non-parallel, two or more of the strands may intersect or otherwise interconnect within the elastic member. The elastic members may be affixed to the diaper in any of several ways which are known in the art. For example, the elastic members may be ultrasonically bonded, heat and pressure sealed using a variety of bonding patterns, or adhesively bonded to diaper 10 with sprayed or swirled patterns of hotmelt or other type of adhesive.

Leg elastic members 34 may comprise a carrier sheet to which are attached a grouped set of elastics composed of a plurality of individual elastic strands. The elastic strands may intersect or be interconnected, or be entirely separated from one another. The carrier sheet may, for example, comprise a 0.002 cm thick film of unembossed polypropylene material. The elastic strands can, for example, be composed of LYCRA elastomer available from DuPont, a business having offices in Wilmington, Delaware. Each elastic strand is typically within the range of about 620-1050 decitex (dtex), and preferably, is about 940 dtex in an embodiment of the invention wherein three strands are employed for each elasticized legband. In addition, leg elastics 34 may be generally straight or optionally curved. For example, the curved elastics can be inwardly bowed toward the longitudinal centerline of the diaper with the innermost point (or apex, relative to the cross-direction of the article) of the set of curved elastic strands positioned approximately 0.75-1.5 inches inward from the outer most edge of the set of elastic strands. In particular arrangements, the curvature of the elastics may not be configured or positioned symmetrically relative to the lateral centerline of the diaper. As representatively shown in Fig. 1, the curved elastics may have an inwardly bowed and outwardly bowed, reflex-type of curvature, and the length-wise center of the elastics may be offset by a selected distance within the range of about 0-8 cm toward either the front or rear waistband of the diaper to provide desired fit and appearance. In particular embodiments of the invention, the innermost point (apex) of the set of curved elastics can be offset about 0-12 cm towards the front or rear waistband of the diaper, and the outwardly bowed reflexed-portion can be positioned toward the diaper front waistband.

An absorbent body, such as absorbent structure 32, is positioned between topsheet 28 and backsheet 30 to form diaper 10. The absorbent body has a construction which is generally compressible, conformable, non-irritating to the wearer's skin, and capable of absorbing and retaining liquid body exudates. It should be understood that, for purposes of this invention, the absorbent structure may comprise a single, integral piece of material, or alternatively, may comprise a plurality of individual separate pieces of material which are operably assembled together. Where the absorbent structure comprises a single, substantially integral piece of material, the material could include the desired structural features formed into selected spatial regions thereof. Where the absorbent structure comprises multiple pieces, the pieces may be configured as discrete layers or as other nonlayered shapes and configurations. Furthermore, the individual pieces may be coextensive or non-coextensive, depending upon the requirements of the product. It is preferred, however, that each of the individual pieces be arranged in an operable, intimate contact along at least a portion of its boundary with at least one other adjacent piece of the absorbent structure. Preferably, each piece is connected to an adjacent portion of the absorbent structure by a suitable bonding and/or fiber entanglement mechanism, such as ultrasonic or adhesive bonding, or mechanical or hydraulic needling.

In the embodiment representatively shown in Fig. 1, absorbent structure 32 includes a liquid-acquisition, target zone 44, and has a contoured, curvilinear periphery, particularly along its side edges. The two generally mirror-image, inwardly bowed, lateral edges provide for a narrower intermediate section suitable for positioning in the crotch of the wearer. In the shown absorbent structure 32, a front section thereof includes two transversely spaced ear regions and a central region. Target zone 44 encompasses the area where repeated liquid surges typically occur in absorbent structure 32. The particular location where liquid is discharged, such as during urination, can vary depending on the age and gender of the wearer. For example, male infants tend to urinate further toward the front end of the diaper. The female target zone is located closer to the center of the crotch. As a result, the shape and relative longitudinal placement of surge management portion 46 can be selected to best correspond with the actual target zone of either or both categories of wearers. Generally stated, the target zone is a section of absorbent structure 32 which is located in the front 60% of the length of the absorbent structure. With reference to the percentage of the total length of

absorbent structure 32 measured into the absorbent structure from the front waistband edge thereof, the target zone may preferably comprise a region which begins at a line positioned approximately 10% of the absorbent structure length away from the front waistband edge and ends at approximately 60% of the absorbent structure length away from the front waistband edge.

Ear regions of the absorbent structure comprise portions which generally extend inwardly from the outermost lateral side edges of the absorbent structure toward its longitudinal center line. Thus, when the diaper is worn, the ear regions are configured to generally engage the sides of the wearer's waist and torso, and central region is configured to generally engage the medial portion of the wearer's waist and torso.

Absorbent structure 32 may be manufactured in a wide variety of sizes and shapes (for example, rectangular, trapezoidal, T-shape, I-shape, hourglass shape, etc.) and from a wide variety of materials. The size and the absorbent capacity of absorbent structure 32 should be compatible with the size of the intended wearer and the liquid loading imparted by the intended use of the absorbent article. Further, the size and the absorbent capacity of absorbent structure 32 can be varied to accommodate wearers ranging from infants through adults. In addition, it has been found that with the present invention, the densities and/or basis weights of the respective surge management 46 and retention 48 portions, as well as their relative ratios, can be varied. In a particular aspect of the invention, the absorbent structure has an absorbent capacity of at least about 300 gm of synthetic urine. Alternatively, the absorbent structure can have an absorbent capacity of at least about 400 gm of synthetic urine to provide improved performance.

Various types of wettable, hydrophilic fibrous material can be used to form the component parts of absorbent structure 32. Examples of suitable fibers include naturally occurring organic fibers composed of intrinsically wettable material, such as cellulosic fibers; synthetic fibers composed of cellulose or cellulose derivatives, such as rayon fibers; inorganic fibers composed of an inherently wettable material, such as glass fibers; synthetic fibers made from inherently wettable thermoplastic polymers, such as particular polyester or polyamide fibers; and synthetic fibers composed of a nonwetable thermoplastic polymer, such as polypropylene fibers, which have been hydrophilized by appropriate means. The fibers may be hydrophilized, for example, by treatment with silica, treatment with a material which has a suitable hydrophilic moiety and is not readily

removable from the fiber, or by sheathing the nonwetable, hydrophobic fiber with a hydrophilic polymer during or after the formation of the fiber. For the purposes of the present invention, it is contemplated that selected blends of the various types of fibers mentioned above may also be employed.

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As used herein, the term "hydrophilic" describes fibers or the surfaces of fibers which are wetted by the aqueous liquids in contact with the fibers. The degree of wetting of the materials can, in turn, be described in terms of the contact angles and the surface tensions of the liquids and materials involved. Equipment and techniques suitable for measuring the wettability of particular fiber materials or blends of fiber materials used for the surge management portion 46 can be provided by a Cahn SFA-222 Surface Force Analyzer System, or a substantially equivalent system. When measured with this system, fibers having contact angles less than 90° are designated "wetable" or hydrophilic, while fibers having contact angles greater than 90° are designated "nonwetable" or hydrophobic.

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Retention portion 48 can comprise a matrix of hydrophilic fibers, such as a web of cellulosic fluff, mixed with particles of high-absorbency material. In particular arrangements, retention portion 48 may comprise a mixture of superabsorbent hydrogel-forming particles and synthetic polymer meltblown fibers, or a mixture of superabsorbent particles with a fibrous coform material comprising a blend of natural fibers and/or synthetic polymer fibers. The superabsorbent particles may be substantially homogeneously mixed with the hydrophilic fibers, or may be nonuniformly mixed. For example, the concentrations of superabsorbent particles may be arranged in a non-step-wise gradient through a substantial portion of the thickness (z-direction) of the absorbent structure, with lower concentrations toward the bodyside of the absorbent structure and relatively higher concentrations toward the outside of the absorbent structure. Suitable z-gradient configurations are described in U.S. Patent 4,699,823 issued October 13, 1987 to Kellenberger et al., the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference in a manner that is consistent with the present description. The superabsorbent particles may also be arranged in a generally discrete layer within the matrix of hydrophilic fibers or may be configured as discrete, separate pocket regions of superabsorbent material. In addition, two or more different types of superabsorbent may be selectively positioned at different locations within or along the fiber matrix.

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The high-absorbency material may comprise absorbent gelling materials, such as superabsorbents. The absorbent gelling materials can be natural, synthetic and modified natural polymers and materials. In addition, the absorbent gelling materials can be inorganic materials, such as silica gels, or organic compounds such as cross-linked polymers. The term "cross-linked" refers to any means for effectively rendering normally water-soluble materials substantially water insoluble but swellable. Such means can include, for example, physical entanglement, crystalline domains, covalent bonds, ionic complexes and associations, hydrophilic associations, such as hydrogen bonding, and hydrophobic associations or Van der Waals forces.

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Examples of synthetic absorbent gelling material polymers include the alkali metal and ammonium salts of poly(acrylic acid) and poly (methacrylic acid), poly(acrylamides), poly(vinyl ethers), maleic anhydride copolymers with vinyl ethers and alpha-olefins, poly(vinyl pyrrolidone), poly(vinylmorpholinone), poly(vinyl alcohol), and mixtures and copolymers thereof. Further polymers suitable for use in the absorbent structure include natural and modified natural polymers, such as hydrolyzed acrylonitrile-grafted starch, acrylic acid grafted starch, methyl cellulose, carboxymethyl cellulose, hydroxypropyl cellulose, and the natural gums, such as alginates, xanthan gum, locust bean gum and the like. Mixtures of natural and wholly or partially synthetic absorbent polymers can also be useful in the present invention. Other suitable absorbent gelling materials are disclosed by Assarsson et al. in U.S. Patent 3,901,236 issued August 26, 1975. Processes for preparing synthetic absorbent gelling polymers are disclosed in U.S. Patent 4,076,663 issued February 28, 1978 to Masuda et al. and U.S. Patent 4,286,082 issued August 25, 1981 to Tsubakimoto et al.

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Synthetic absorbent gelling materials typically are xerogels which form hydrogels when wetted. The term "hydrogel", however, has commonly been used to also refer to both the wetted and unwetted forms of the material.

As mentioned previously, the high-absorbency material used in retention portion 48 is generally in the form of discrete particles. The particles can be of any desired shape, for example, spiral or semi-spiral, cubic, rod-like, polyhedral, etc. Shapes having a large greatest dimension/smallest dimension ratio, like needles, flakes, and fibers, are also contemplated for use herein. Conglomerates of particles of absorbent gelling material may also be used in retention portion 48.

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Preferred for use are particles having an average size of from about 20 microns to about 1 millimeter. "Particle size" as used herein means the weighted average of the smallest dimension of the individual particles.

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An example of superabsorbent polymer suitable for use in the present invention is Favor® SAB 870 polymer available from Stockhausen, Inc., a business having offices in Greensboro, North Carolina.

- 10 The matrix of hydrophilic fibers comprising retention portion 48 may be a layer of cellulosic wood pulp fluff, and the particles of superabsorbent polymer can be distributed within the matrix of hydrophilic fibers. The hydrophilic fibers and high-absorbency particles can be provided in a fiber-to-particle ratio which is not more than about 75:25, alternatively, is not more than about 70:30, and optionally, is not more than about 55:45, by weight. In further aspects of the invention, the fiber-to-particle ratio is not less than about 25:75, preferably is not less than about 30:70 and more preferably is not less than about 45:55, by weight. Such fiber-to-particle ratios can be particularly desirable in the target zone of the absorbent structure. In particular embodiments of the invention, the fiber-to-particle weight ratio is not more than about 65:35 and is not less than about 50:50 to provide desired performance.

- 25 The hydrophilic fibers and high-absorbency particles can form an average composite basis weight which is within the range of about 400-900 gsm. Again, such basis weight is particularly desirable in the target zone of the absorbent structure. In certain aspects of the invention, the average composite basis weight is within the range of about 500-800 gsm, and preferably is within the range of about 550-750 gsm to provide desired performance.

- 30 To provide the desired thinness dimension to the various configurations of the absorbent article of the invention, retention portion 48 can be configured with a bulk thickness which is not more than about 1.0 cm. Preferably, the bulk thickness is not more than about 0.6 cm, and more preferably is not more than about 0.5 cm to provide improved benefits. The bulk thickness is determined under a restraining pressure of 0.2 psi (1.38 kPa).

The density of retention portion 48 or other component of the absorbent article can be calculated from its basis weight and thickness. With respect to diapers, for example, the weight and thickness are measured on newly unpacked, unfolded and dry diapers at a restraining pressure of 0.2 psi (1.38 kPa). Conventional thickness measuring devices
5 may be employed to determine the thickness needed to calculate the density.

In the illustrated embodiments of the invention, absorbent retention portion 48 includes 4-22 grams of wood pulp fluff, preferably includes about 8-14 grams of fluff and more preferably includes about 10-12 grams of fluff to provide desired benefits. The wood
10 pulp fluff generally provides shape and form to diaper 10, and carries and positions the particles of superabsorbent polymer or other high-absorbency material. Retention portion 48 can contain about 7-12 grams of superabsorbent polymer, and in the shown embodiment, contains about 8.5 grams of superabsorbent polymer. Sufficient
15 superabsorbent polymer is incorporated into retention portion 48 to provide an adequate total absorbent capacity of at least about 300 gm of urine. For example, a medium size diaper for an infant weighing about 13-23 lb can typically have a total retention capacity of about 500 grams of urine.

The fluff and superabsorbent particles can be selectively placed into desired zones of
20 retention portion 48. For example, the fluff basis weight may vary across the width dimension of retention portion 48. Alternatively, relatively larger amounts of fluff may be positioned toward the front waistband end of the retention portion. For example, see U.S. Patent 4,585,448 issued April 29, 1986, to K. Enloe. In the illustrated embodiment, the majority of the superabsorbent material may be distributed down a medial region of
25 retention portion 48 which extends along the length dimension of the retention portion and measures about 3.5-4.5 inches in width. In addition, the superabsorbent material may have a selected zoned placement to reduce the amount of superabsorbent material located proximate the side and end edges of the retention portion. The reduced amounts of superabsorbent material at the edges of the retention portion can improve the
30 containment of the superabsorbent particles within the fibrous fluff matrix of retention portion 48. The pulsed, zoned placement of the superabsorbent material can, for example, be achieved by the method and apparatus described in U.S. Patent 5,028,224 to C. Pieper et al., entitled METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR INTERMITTENTLY DEPOSITING PARTICULATE MATERIAL IN A SUBSTRATE and issued July 2, 1991

(Attorney Docket No. 8761), the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference in a manner that is consistent herewith.

5 In a particular aspect of the invention, absorbent structure 32 can be generally T-shaped with the laterally extending cross-bar of the "T" generally corresponding to the front waistband portion of the absorbent article for improved performance, especially for male infants. In the illustrated embodiments, for example, the retention portion across the ear section of the front waistband region of the article has a cross-directional width of about 9.0 inches, the narrowest portion of the crotch section has a width of about 3.5 inches
10 and the back waistband region has a width of about 4.5 inches.

With reference to Fig. 2, the entire absorbent structure 32, or any individual portion thereof, such as the retention portion, can be overwrapped in a hydrophilic high wet-strength envelope web, such as a high wet-strength tissue or a synthetic fibrous web. Such overwrapping web can also increase the in-use integrity of the absorbent structure.

15 The web can be suitably bonded, such as with adhesive, to absorbent structure 32 and to other components of the product construction.

Due to the high concentrations of superabsorbent particles, or other high-absorbency material, in retention portion 48, there can be an increased difficulty with regard to
20 containing the high-absorbency particles within the retention portion and restricting the movement or migration of the superabsorbent onto the bodyside of the diaper. To improve the containment of the high-absorbency material, absorbent structure 32 can include an improved overwrap, such as wrap sheet 70, placed immediately adjacent and around retention portion 48. The wrap sheet is preferably a layer of absorbent material
25 which covers the major bodyside and outside surfaces of the retention portion, and preferably encloses substantially all of the peripheral edges of the retention portion to form a substantially complete envelope thereabout. Alternatively, the wrap sheet can provide an absorbent wrap which covers the major bodyside and outside surfaces of the retention portion, and encloses substantially only the lateral side edges of the
30 retention portion. Accordingly, both the linear and the inwardly curved portions of the lateral side edges of the wrap sheet would be closed about the retention portion. In such an arrangement, however, the end edges of the wrap sheet may not be completely closed around the end edges of the retention portion at the waistband regions of the article.

At least the bodyside layer of wrap sheet 70 has a pore distribution wherein no more than about 5 percent of the pores, as measured by Coulter porometry, are greater than about 50 micrometers in diameter. For example, the complete wrap sheet 70, or at least the bodyside layer of the wrap sheet, may comprise a meltblown web composed of
5 meltblown polypropylene fibers having a fiber size of about 5 micrometers and arranged to form a basis weight within the range of about 8-20 gsm.

Another example of absorbent wrap 70 may comprise a low porosity cellulosic tissue web composed of an approximately 50/50 blend of hardwood/softwood fibers. The tissue has
10 a 13 lb basis weight at the reel and a porosity of about 90 cfs/sq. ft. Similar to the meltblown wrap sheet material, the entire tissue wrapsheet material, or at least the bodyside layer thereof, has not more than about 5 percent of its pores greater than about 50 micrometers in diameter. Preferably, not more than about 1 percent of the pores are greater than 50 micrometers in diameter.

15 Absorbent wrap 70 may comprise a multi-element wrapsheet which includes a separate bodyside wrap layer and a separate outside wrap layer, each of which extends past all or some of the peripheral edges of retention portion 48, as representatively shown in Fig. 2. Such a configuration of the wrap sheet can, for example, facilitate the formation
20 of a substantially complete sealing and closure around the peripheral edges of retention portion 48. In the back waistband portion of the illustrated diaper, the absorbent wrap may also be configured to extend an increased distance away from the periphery of the retention portion to add opacity and strength to the back ear sections of the diaper. In the illustrated embodiment, the bodyside and outside layers of absorbent wrap 70
25 extend at least about 1/2 inch beyond the peripheral edges of the retention portion to provide an outwardly protruding, flange-type bonding area over which the periphery of the bodyside portion of the absorbent wrap may be completely or partially connected to the periphery of the outside portion of the absorbent wrap.

30 The bodyside and outside layers of wrap sheet 70 may be composed of substantially the same material, or may be composed of different materials. For example, the outside layer of the wrap sheet may be composed of a relatively lower basis weight material having a relatively high porosity, such as a wet strength cellulosic tissue composed of softwood pulp. The bodyside layer of the wrap sheet may comprise one of
35 the previously described wrap sheet materials which has a relatively low porosity. The

low porosity bodyside layer can better prevent the migration of superabsorbent particles onto the wearer's skin, and the high porosity, lower basis weight outside layer can help reduce costs.

- 5 To provide the bonding between the bodyside and outside portions of absorbent wrap 70, an adhesive, such as National Starch 72-3723 adhesive, can be printed onto the appointed bonding areas of the absorbent wrap with, for example, a rotogravure-type system. The adhesive is available from National Starch and Chemical Co., a business having offices in Bridgewater, New Jersey, and rotogravure-type adhesive applicators are
- 10 available from Egan Machinery Division, a business having offices at Oconto Falls, Wisconsin. Retention portion 48 can then be placed between the bodyside and outside portions of absorbent wrap 70, and the mating edges of the absorbent wrap portions can be bonded together to provide a generally complete peripheral seal along substantially the entire perimeter of the retention portion 48. In the illustrated
- 15 embodiment, the adhesive is applied at an add-on rate of about 5 grams of solids per square meter of bonding to attach together the lapping edges of the bodyside and outside portions of absorbent wrap 70.

- With alternative arrangements having an absorbent wrap composed of a nonwoven
- 20 meltblown fibrous web, the peripheral sealing of the bodyside and outside wrap layers may be accomplished by employing hot calendering to provide a sealed strip region around the periphery of the retention portion.

- Due to the thinness of retention portion 48 and the high superabsorbent concentrations
- 25 within the retention portion, the liquid uptake rates of the retention portion, by itself, may be too low, or may not be adequately sustained over three insults of liquid into the absorbent structure. The addition of a porous, liquid-permeable layer of surge management material, however, can advantageously improve the overall uptake rate of the composite absorbent structure. Surge management portion 46 is typically less
- 30 hydrophilic than retention portion 48, and has an operable level of density and basis weight to quickly collect and temporarily hold liquid surges, to transport the liquid from its initial entrance point and to substantially completely release the liquid to other parts of the absorbent structure 32, particularly retention portion 48. This configuration can help prevent the liquid from pooling and collecting on the portion of the absorbent garment

positioned against the wearer's skin, thereby reducing the feeling of wetness by the wearer.

Various woven and nonwoven fabrics can be used to construct surge management portion 46. For example, the surge management portion may be a layer composed of a meltblown or spunbonded web of polyolefin fibers. The surge management layer may also be a bonded-carded-web or an airlaid web composed of natural and synthetic fibers. The bonded-carded-web may, for example, be a powder-bonded-carded web, an infrared bonded carded web, or a through-air-bonded-carded web. The infrared and through-air bonded carded webs can optionally include a mixture of different fibers, and the fiber lengths within a selected fabric web may be within the range of about 1.0-3.0 inch. The surge management portion may be composed of a substantially hydrophobic material, and the hydrophobic material may optionally be treated with a surfactant or otherwise processed to impart a desired level of wettability and hydrophilicity.

Surge management portion 46 can have a generally uniform thickness and cross-sectional area. Alternatively, a configuration can be used wherein the bodyside surface area of the surge management portion is greater or less than the surface area of a section taken along an X-Y plane located below the bodyside surface of the surge management portion.

The representative diaper 10 can include a surge management portion 46 which is arranged in a direct, contacting liquid communication with an adjacent absorbent retention portion 48. As representatively shown, surge management portion 46 may be configured for placement adjacent an outwardly facing, outside of topsheet 28. Optionally, the surge management portion can be placed adjacent an inwardly facing, bodyside surface of topsheet layer 28. The shown configuration of the surge management portion is operably connected to the topsheet layer with a conventional pattern of adhesive, such as a swirl adhesive pattern. In addition, the surge management portion can be operably connected to the bodyside layer of wrapsheet 70 with a conventional pattern of adhesive. The amount of adhesive add-on should be sufficient to provide the desired levels of bonding, but should be low enough to avoid excessively restricting the movement of liquid from the topsheet layer, through the surge management portion and through the wrapsheet layer.

In the various embodiments of the invention, at least a major part of surge management portion 46 is located within target zone 44, and optionally, the surge management portion can have an areal extent which extends completely over target zone 44. Retention portion 48 is positioned in liquid communication with surge management portion 46 to
5 receive liquids released from the surge management portion, and to hold and store the liquid. In the shown embodiments, surge management portion 46 comprises a separate layer which is positioned over another, separate layer comprising the retention portion, thereby forming a dual-layer arrangement. The surge management portion serves to quickly collect and temporarily hold discharged liquids, to transport such liquids from the
10 point of initial contact and spread the liquid to other parts of the surge management portion, and then to substantially completely release such liquids into the layer or layers comprising retention portion 48.

The representatively shown configuration of the surge management portion is
15 substantially free of absorbent gelling material. Surge management portion 46 may, however, contain a very small amount of particulate gelling material to help acquire an initial liquid surge, but the amount should not be excessive. When excessive amounts of particulate absorbent gelling material are maintained in target zone 44, however, the particles can cause the structure to retain and hold unacceptably high amounts of the
20 liquid. In addition, the transport of liquids away from target zone 44 to other sections of absorbent structure 32, particularly retention portion 48, can be undesirably impaired.

As mentioned previously, surge layer 46 can be a separately formed layer, which lies adjacent the outwardly facing surface of topsheet 28 between the retention portion and
25 topsheet. Thus, surge management portion 46 need not comprise the entire thickness of absorbent structure 32. The retention portion can optionally include a recess area which wholly or partially surrounds surge management portion 46, or the retention portion can be entirely positioned below the surge management portion. The arrangement which includes the recess in retention portion 48 can advantageously increase the area of
30 contact and liquid communication between the retention portion and surge management portion 48. It should be understood, however, that surge management portion 46 could optionally be constructed to extend through the entire thickness of absorbent structure 32 so that the capillary flow of liquid into retention portion 48 occurs primarily in a generally sideways (X-Y) direction.

A capillary force differential created at the interface between the retention portion 48 and the material immediately adjacent the bodyside of the retention portion can improve the containment characteristics of absorbent structure 32. For example, if the surge management portion is composed of layer 46 positioned immediately adjacent to the retention portion, and if the surge layer is appropriately configured to provide and maintain a relatively lower capillary attraction, as compared to the capillary attraction exhibited by retention portion 48, then liquid surges occurring in target zone 44 tend to be desorbed more readily from the surge management portion and into the retention portion. Because retention portion 48 can thereby have a relatively higher capillarity than surge management portion 46, the liquid surges tend to be drawn into retention portion 48 and distributed to the more remote regions thereof by wicking along the plane generally defined by the retention portion.

The surge management portion can be of any desired shape consistent with the absorbency requirements of absorbent structure 32. Suitable shapes include for example, circular, rectangular, triangular, trapezoidal, oblong, dog-boned, hourglass-shaped, or oval. Preferred shapes of the surge management portion are those that increase the contacting, liquid communicating surface area between surge management portion 46 and retention portion 48 so that the relative capillarity difference between the portions can be fully utilized. In certain embodiments, for example, the surge management portion can be generally rectangular-shaped.

In the various configurations of the invention, surge management portion 46 may extend over the complete length of retention portion 48, or may extend over only a part of the retention portion length. Where the surge management portion extends only partially along the length of the retention portion, the surge management portion may be selectively positioned anywhere along absorbent structure 32. For example, surge management portion 46 may function more efficiently when it is offset toward the front waistband of the garment and transversely centered within a front section of absorbent structure 32. Thus, surge management portion 46 can be approximately centered about the longitudinal center line of absorbent structure 32, and positioned primarily in a central region of a front section of the absorbent structure 32.

In other aspects of the invention, the end edges of the surge management portion can be spaced longitudinally inboard from the end edges of the retention portion 48. In

particular configurations of the invention, the corresponding, relatively adjacent front end edge of surge management portion 46 can be spaced a predetermined discrete distance from a front waistband end edge of the retention portion 48.

- 5 It has been found that an effective fabric for constructing the surge management portion can be distinctively characterized by particular parameters. Such parameters include, for example, basis weight, permeability, porosity, surface area per void volume (SA/VV), compression resiliency and saturation capacity. Further parameters can include a bonding matrix which will help stabilize the pore size structure, and hydrophilicity. The
10 bond-matrix and the blend of fiber deniers can advantageously provide for and substantially maintain a desired pore size structure.

- Additional details regarding the surge materials and suitable techniques for determining the above-described parameters are set forth in U.S. Patent Application Serial
15 No. 206,986 of C. Ellis and D. Bishop, entitled, FIBROUS NONWOVEN WEB SURGE LAYER FOR PERSONAL CARE ABSORBENT ARTICLES AND THE LIKE, and filed March 4, 1994 (Attorney docket No. 11,256); and U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 206,069 of C. Ellis and R. Everett, entitled, IMPROVED SURGE MANAGEMENT FIBROUS NONWOVEN WEB FOR PERSONAL CARE ABSORBENT ARTICLES AND
20 THE LIKE, and filed March 4, 1994 (Attorney docket No. 11,387); the disclosures of which are hereby incorporated by reference in a manner that is consistent herewith.

- In particular configurations of the invention, the surge material can include bicomponent fibers. For example, polypropylene/polyethylene bicomponent fibers may be employed to
25 form the bicomponent fiber portion of any of the described fabrics. In addition, the bicomponent fibers may be flat crimped or helically crimped.

- In particular aspects of the invention, the fibrous nonwoven web comprising surge management portion 46 can be a bonded, uniformly mixed, single layer structure having
30 a basis weight of at least 20 grams per square meter, a void volume between about 40 and 60 cubic centimeters per gram of web at a pressure of 689 dynes per square meter (0.01 psi), a permeability of about 5,000 to about 8,000 darcy, a porosity of about 97.2% to about 98.8% and a surface area per void volume of about 24 to about 49 square centimeters per cubic centimeters. The web fibers may be thermoplastic, and may be
35 heat bonded to one another. In addition, the web structure can have a density within a

range of about 0.017-0.025 gm/cc, as determined at a pressure of 689 dynes per square meter (0.01 psi).

5 In other aspects of the invention, the fibrous nonwoven web can be made from or include a plurality of fibers bonded to one another to form a lofty nonwoven web having a basis weight of at least 20 grams per square meter. In more refined embodiments, the basis weight can range from about 40 to about 68 grams per square meter. The web can be made entirely from bicomponent fibers which are typically crimped and which will generally have a fiber denier equal to or greater than 2 denier. Alternatively, the web can
10 be made from a combination of fibers such as bicomponent fibers and polyester fibers. In such embodiments, the web will usually include at least 50 percent by weight of bicomponent fibers. The resultant web will have a void volume of between about 80 and about 117 cubic centimeters per gram of web at 689 dynes per square centimeter pressure, a permeability of about 8,000 to about 15,000 darcy, a porosity of about 98.6
15 to about 99.4 percent, a surface area per void volume of about 10 to about 25 square centimeters per cubic centimeter, a saturation capacity between about 55 and about 80 grams of 0.9 percent saline solution per gram of web and a compression resilience in both the wet and dry state of at least 60 percent. In addition, the web structure can have a density within a range of about 0.008-0.013 gm/cc, as determined at a pressure of
20 689 dynes per square meter (0.01 psi).

The basis weight of surge portion 46 can be important for providing a total holding capacity which is adequate to temporarily retain the amount of liquid that is typically discharged by a wearer during a single surge/insult of liquid into the absorbent article. It
25 will be readily apparent that absorbent articles requiring more surge capacity may also require proportionally greater amounts of surge management material. The surge management material, however, need not be of uniform basis weight throughout its areal extent, but instead can be arranged so that some sections have more surge management material compared to other sections. For the purposes of the present
30 invention, the effective basis weight will be the weight of the surge management material divided by the area over which the surge management portion extends. The surge management material employed with the present invention will be at least about 20 grams per square meter with no real upper limit, with the target range being from about 40 to about 68 grams per square meter.

To ensure rapid intake of liquid, the overall structure of the surge portion 46 should have hydrophilic tendencies. At least a portion of the fibers should have a contact angle less than 90 degrees. As a result, the fibrous nonwoven web will have sufficient hydrophilic tendencies when the web has a saturation capacity greater than 55 grams of 0.9% saline solution per gram of web.

Another important feature of the surge material employed with the present invention is its resiliency in both the wet and dry states. A unique feature of the surge material is the amount of liquid which the material is able to absorb upon rapid insult. In addition, once the liquid has been absorbed, the surge material does not readily collapse. Excessive collapse would be detrimental to the overall performance of the material in that the collapsing of the material would result in a reduced capacity for retaining liquid. Surge materials employed with the present invention should have compression resilience values in both the wet and dry states of at least about 60%.

The distinctive permeability, specific volume, porosity, and ratio of surface area to void volume parameters within the surge management portion of the invention can advantageously provide for a sufficiently rapid uptake of the liquid surges delivered onto the target zone, and also allow a controlled spreading of the liquid through the void volume of its structure to temporarily fill it. Over a relatively short period of time, the surge management portion can then be desorbed through the cooperative operation of the underlying or otherwise adjacent liquid retention portion.

The surge management portion is configured to cooperate with the other diaper components, such as top sheet 28 and retention portion 48, to provide for a rapid uptake of liquid discharges from the wearer. It is appreciated that a surge material with relatively small pore sizes may exhibit a rate of liquid penetration into the retention portion which may be too slow. A layer of surge management material having relatively large pore sizes, however, may provide insufficient restriction to sideways movement of liquid through the material along the plane of the material layer. As a result, the liquid may run off to the sides of the layer and leak from the article before the absorbent retention material can gather and contain the liquid. Such undesired, excessive run off may become more apparent when the absorbent material has already absorbed one or more previous discharges of liquid.

To help reduce the occurrence of excessive run off, the surge management portion of the present invention can be configured to have edge barriers constructed along selected edge regions thereof. In particular aspects, the edge barriers can be provided for by separate layers of barrier material or by edge regions which are otherwise configured to include relatively small pores therein. The small pore regions can be located along the end edge regions and/or side edge regions of the surge management portion, and are configured to be sufficiently continuous to provide operable barriers to the sideways movement of liquid.

10 In the various configurations of the invention, the edge barrier may be provided at only the end edges of the surge material. Alternatively, the edge barrier may be provided at only the side edges of the surge material, and optionally may be provided at both the end and side edges of the surge material to provide desired performance.

15 In the shown configuration, elasticized side panel members 56 and 58 are separate members operably connected and attached to laterally opposed end sections of the backsheet 30 by adhesive lines 84 and 86. The side panels may be composed of a substantially elastomeric material, such as a stretch-bonded-laminate (SBL) material, a neck-bonded-laminate (NBL) material, an elastomeric film, an elastomeric foam material, or the like. For example, suitable meltblown elastomeric fibrous webs are described in 20 U.S. Patent 4,663,220 issued May 5, 1987 to T. Wisneski et al., the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference. Examples of composite fabrics comprising at least one layer of nonwoven textile fabric secured to a fibrous elastic layer are described in European Patent No. EP 0 217 032 published on April 8, 1987 with the inventors listed as J. Taylor et al., the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference. Examples 25 of NBL materials are described in U.S. Patent 5,226,992 issued July 13, 1993 to Mormon, the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated by reference.

Alternatively, the elasticized side panels may be integrally formed at laterally opposed end regions of at least one of the front and rear waistband sections. For example, the elasticized side panels may be formed from the topsheet layer 28 and/or backsheet layer 30. In the shown embodiments, the elasticized side panels are, themselves, elastically stretchable at least along a laterally extending cross-direction of the article. In the case of integrally formed side panels, the side panels may be rendered elastically

stretchable by attaching an elastomeric material to the topsheet layer and/or backsheet layer.

5 The elasticized side panels may, themselves, be elastically stretchable at least along a laterally extending cross-direction of the article or they may be rendered elastically stretchable by elasticizing a portion of the diaper located between the elasticized side panels so that the side panels can be pulled laterally to create an elastic tension. For example, an area of front or rear waistband section located between the side panels may be elasticized to render the side panels elastically laterally stretchable. This may be
10 accomplished by utilizing an elastically stretchable material as the backsheet layer and forming the side panels from a non elastic material. The elastically stretchable nature of the backsheet layer would, nonetheless, render the side panels "elasticized" and "elastically laterally stretchable".

15 The fastening means, such as provided by tape tab fasteners 36, are typically applied to the back waistband region 14 of diaper 10 to provide a mechanism for holding the diaper on the wearer. Tape tab fasteners 36 can be any of those well known in the art, and are typically applied to the corners of diaper 10. For example, adhesive fasteners, mechanical fasteners, hook and loop fasteners, snaps, pins or buckles, may be used
20 alone, or in combination. In the shown configuration, the fasteners are adhesive fasteners, which are constructed to releasably adhere to a landing zone patch 52 attached to the front waistband section of the diaper to provide a refastenable adhesive fastening system. More particularly, the fastener tabs 36 connect to associated, laterally outboard edge regions of the side panels 56 and 58 along an appointed factory-bond
25 region of the tab fasteners. In particular aspects of the invention, the fastener tabs can have a relatively wide user-bond section in combination with a relatively narrower intermediate section. The intermediate section is positioned between the user-bond and factory-bond sections of the fastener tab.

30 In use, the fastening tabs 36 secure the diaper 10 on a wearer by attaching the adhesive fastener tabs 36 to landing zone patch 52. This results in the formation of overlapped portions in which a portion of the fastener tab 36, elasticized side panels 56 and 58 and/or topsheet 28 overlap on to the outer surface of the diaper 10 in the front waistband section 12.

To prevent the overlapped portions from freely sliding past one another in use, the diaper further includes tackified areas 40.

5 Tackified areas 40 comprise a tackifying agent providing a coefficient of friction for the overlapped portions of less than about 350 grams, alternatively of less than about 250 grams, alternatively of less than about 150 grams. The tackified areas 40 serve to maintain the relative position of the overlapped portions of diaper 10 during use of the diaper. Specifically, the tackified areas prevent or reduce movement of the overlapped portions of the diaper 10 relative to one another. The tackified areas 40 illustrated in
10 Fig. 1 will, for example, encounter topsheet 28 in the rear waistband section 14 with enough friction to prevent movement of the tackified area with respect to the portion of topsheet 28 in contact with it. The elastic nature of the elasticized side panels serve, in use, to create and maintain contact between overlapped portions, for example, topsheet 28 and tackified area 40. This contact maintains the relative position of the overlapped
15 portions of the diaper 10 during use.

The tackifying agents of the present invention are preferred for use over adhesive materials. While adhesive materials may serve to prevent relative movement of the overlapped portions of the diaper, they tend to be expensive and can adhere to the skin
20 of a wearer when brought into contact therewith. The tackifying agents of the present invention are less expensive than adhesives and do not generally adhere to the skin of a wearer with sufficient force to cause injury or discomfort.

While the tackified areas 40 are illustrated in Fig. 1 as being located on the outer
25 surface 31 of backsheet layer 30 in the front waistband section 12 of diaper 10, it is clear that the tackified areas could also be located on the body-facing side of the elasticized side panels 56 or 58 or on the outer surface 29 of topsheet layer 28 in the rear waistband section 14 of diaper 10.

30 In the embodiment illustrated in figure 1, each tackified area 40 suitably comprises about 50 square centimeters of area. The tackified area 40 suitably comprises at least about 10 square centimeters of area, alternatively about 30 square centimeters of area, alternatively from about 30 to about 75 square centimeters of area. The tackified area is formed by applying a tackifying agent to the desired location on diaper 10. The tackifying
35 agent may be applied to diaper 10 by spraying, printing, or similar methods. The

tackifying agent may be applied in a continuous or discontinuous manner and may be located in a single area or in a plurality of areas. For example, Figure 3 illustrates an embodiment in which the tackified area 40 comprises 4 separate rectangular patches of tackifying agent. The tackified area 40 may be located on both the outer surface 31 in the front waistband section 12 and on the outer surface 29 of the topsheet layer 28 in the rear waistband section 14.

Alternatively, the tackified area 40 may be formed from an material which is inherently tacky. For example, if the tackified area 40 were located on the body-facing side of a side panel, the side panel may itself be formed from a tacky material such as a material comprising a styrene block copolymer.

Suitable tackifying agents include but are not limited to compounds comprising polybutylene, polyisobutylene, polybutene, poly (styrene butadiene rubber), styrenic block copolymers, poly (ethylene vinyl acetate), poly acrylates, ethylene acrylic acid, ethylene methyl methacrylate and the like. The tackifying agents suitably have an adhesive bond strength of less than about 300 grams, alternatively of less than about 200 grams, alternatively of from about 50 to about 150 grams. The adhesive bond strength of suitable tackifying agents can be determined according to, for example, the Pressure Sensitive Tape Council 180 degree peel resistance test, described on page 23 of the tenth edition of Test Methods, published 1992, by the Pressure Sensitive Tape Council, Chicago, Illinois, using a 1 inch wide test specimen and an Instron Tensile tester crosshead speed of 12 inches per minute (305 millimeters/minute). The coefficient of friction for the overlapped portions in contact with the tackified area can be determined, for example, according to American Society for Testing and Materials, (ASTM) test method D4917, Volume 15.09, 1995 edition, page 664.

Applicants have found that the presence of the elasticized side panels create, when in use on a wearer, sufficient tension to maintain the overlapped portions of diaper in contact with one another. This elastic tension makes it possible to use tackifying agents having a relatively low adhesive bond strength. This is desirable since the tackified areas may, on occasion, come into contact with the body of a wearer. If the tackified area has an adhesive bond strength greater than those described above, it will tend to adhere to the skin of a wearer, thus causing discomfort upon removal of the absorbent article. The presence of the elasticized area maintains enough contact between the overlapped

portions so that the tackified areas can have a relatively low adhesive bond strength which is nonetheless able to maintain the relative positions of the overlapped portions with respect to one another. Yet, if the tackified area comes into contact with the body of a wearer, discomfort upon removal of the article from the body of a wearer is minimized.

5

A suitable tackifying agent is commercially available from Findley Adhesives, Wauwatosa Wisconsin, under the trade designation 995-373 or from National Starch and Chemical, Bridgewater, New Jersey, under the trade designation 34-5602. Add-on rates of the tackifying agents to form the tackified areas will suitably be from about 3 to about 10 20 grams per square meter, preferably of from about 7 to about 14 grams per square meter.

Figs. 3 and 4 illustrate an alternative embodiment of a disposable diaper according to the present invention. Like numerals appearing in Figs. 3 and 4 correspond to the like 15 elements appearing in Figs. 1 and 2. Figs. 3 and 4 illustrate a diaper substantially identical to that illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2 with the exception that elasticized side panels 56 and 58 have been replaced with elasticized side panels having a different configuration than those illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2. Further, adhesive fastening tab 36 has been replaced with a mechanical fastener 37 and landing zone patch 52 comprises a 20 mechanical fastener releasably engageable with mechanical fasteners 37. For example, mechanical fastener 37 may comprise a hook component of a hook-and-loop fastener and landing zone patch 52 would comprise the loop component of said hook-and-loop fastener. Such hook-and-loop fasteners are known to those skilled in the art.

25 Articles which include elastomeric side panels and distinctively configured fasteners are described in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 168,615 of T. Roessler et al., entitled DYNAMIC FITTING DIAPER and filed December 16, 1993 (Attorney docket No. 10,961), and U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 08/366,090 of E. Ruscher et al., entitled, 30 FLEXIBLE MECHANICAL FASTENING TAB and filed December 28, 1994 (Attorney docket No. 10,757) the disclosures of which are hereby incorporated herein by reference in a manner that is consistent herewith. The fastening systems can include a stress beam member for distributing applied stresses in the area of the side panel material, and can include fastening tabs which incorporate a necked down intermediate region in combination with a relatively wider, user-bond section thereof. Techniques for forming 35 the desired fastening systems are described in U.S. Patent Application Serial

No. 200,593 of T. Roessler et al., entitled METHOD FOR MAKING A FASTENING SYSTEM FOR A DYNAMIC FITTING DIAPER and filed February 23, 1994 (Attorney docket No. 11,186), the disclosure of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference in a manner that is consistent herewith.

5

While the invention has been described in detail with respect to specific embodiments thereof, it will be appreciated that those skilled in the art, upon attaining an understanding of the foregoing, may readily conceive of alterations to, variations of, and equivalents to these embodiments. Accordingly, the scope of the present invention

10 should be assessed as that of the appended claims and any equivalents thereto.

What is claimed is:

1. A disposable absorbent article having a front waistband section, a rear waistband section, and an intermediate section which interconnects said front and rear waistband sections, said article comprising:
 - a backsheet layer having an outer surface;
 - 5 a liquid-permeable topsheet layer having an outer surface and being superposed on said backsheet layer;
 - an absorbent body located between said topsheet layer and said backsheet layer;
 - an elasticized side panel located at each laterally opposed end region of at least
 - 10 one of said front and rear waistband sections;
 - fastening means for securing said article on a wearer by forming overlapped portions, said fastening means connected to at least one of said side panels; and
 - a tackified area in at least one of said overlapped portions, said tackified area comprising a tackifying agent providing a coefficient of friction for the overlapped portions
 - 15 of less than about 350 grams.
2. The absorbent article according to claim 1 wherein said elasticized side panel is connected to said article in said rear waistband section.
3. The absorbent article according to claim 2 wherein said tackified area is located on said outer surface of said backsheet layer in said front waistband section.
4. The absorbent article according to claim 2 wherein said tackified area is located on the outer surface of said topsheet layer in said rear waistband section.
5. The absorbent article according to claim 2 wherein said tackified area is located on the body-facing side of said elasticized side panel.
6. The absorbent article according to claim 2 wherein said side panels are constructed to be elastically stretchable at least along a lateral, cross-direction of said article

7. The absorbent article according to claim 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 wherein said tackifying agent is selected from the group consisting of compounds comprising polybutylene, polyisobutylene, polybutene, poly (styrene butadiene rubber), styrenic block copolymers, poly (ethylene vinyl acetate), poly acrylates, ethylene acrylic acid, and ethylene methyl methacrylate.
- 5
8. The absorbent article according to claim 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6 wherein said tackifying agent provides a coefficient of friction for said overlapped portions of less than about 250 grams.
9. The absorbent article according to claim 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or 6 wherein said tackifying agent provides a coefficient of friction for said overlapped portions of from about 50 to about 150 grams.
10. The absorbent article according to claim 1 wherein said tackifying agent has an adhesive bond strength of less than about 300 grams.
11. A disposable absorbent article having a front waistband section, a rear waistband section and an intermediate section which interconnects said front and rear waistband sections, said article comprising:
- a backsheet layer having an outer surface;
 - 5 a liquid-permeable topsheet layer having an outer surface and being superposed on said backsheet layer;
 - an absorbent body located between said topsheet layer and said backsheet layer;
 - an elasticized side panel connected to said article at each laterally opposed end
 - 10 region of said rear waistband section, said side panels constructed to be elastically stretchable at least along a lateral cross-direction of said article;
 - fastening means for securing said article on a wearer by forming overlapped portions, said fastening means connected to said side panels; and
 - a tackified area located on the outer surface of said backsheet layer at each
 - 15 laterally opposed end region of said front waistband section, said tackified area providing a coefficient of friction for said overlapped portions of less than about 350 grams.

1/2

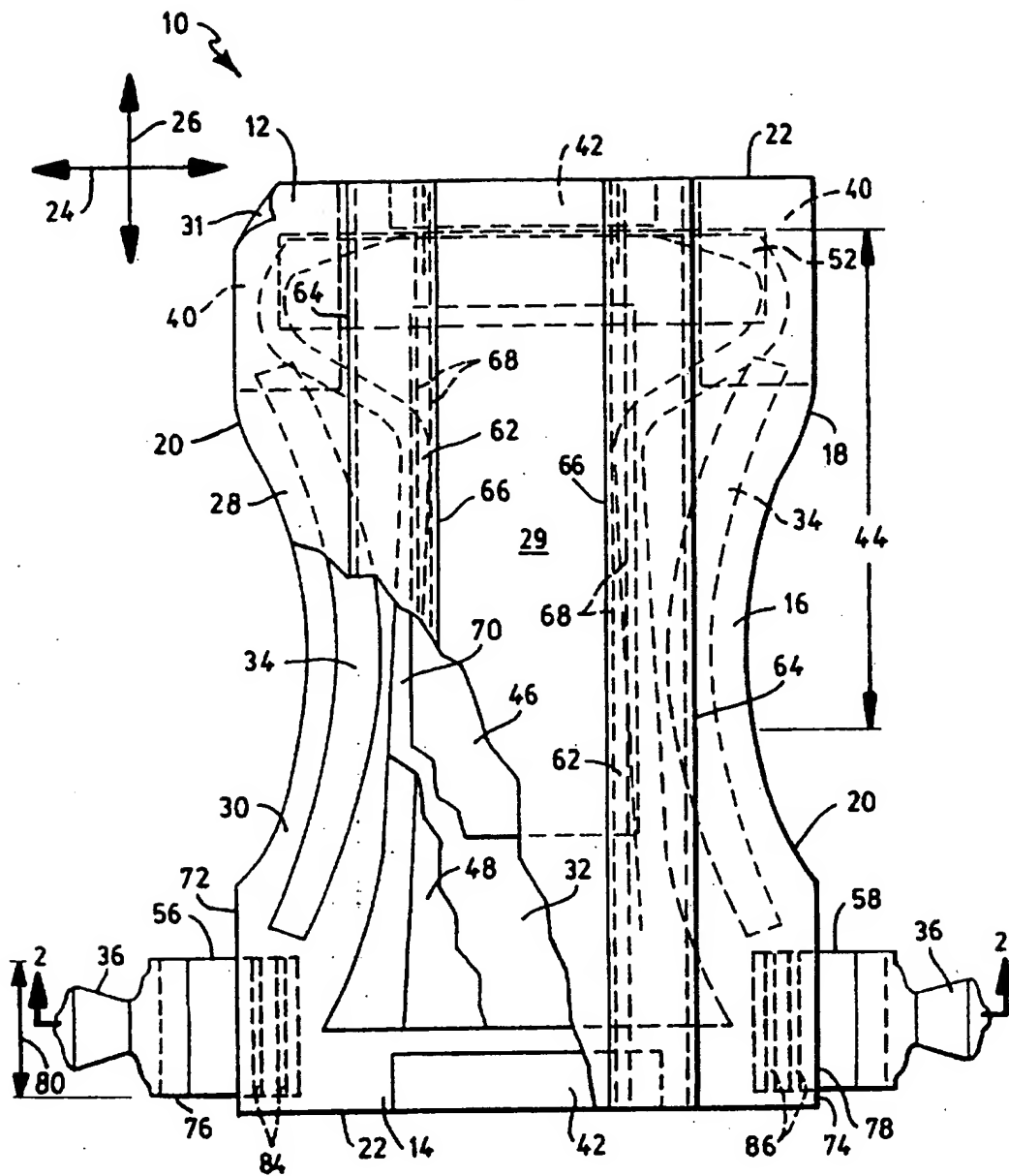


FIG. 1

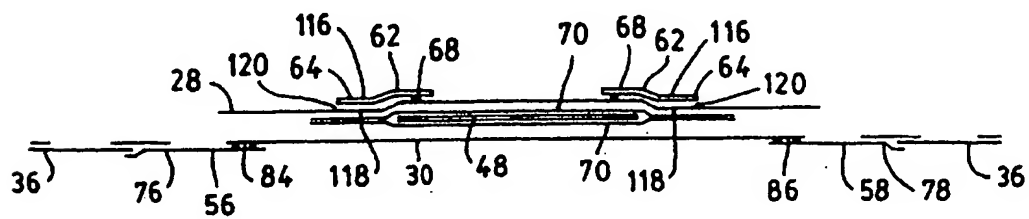


FIG. 2

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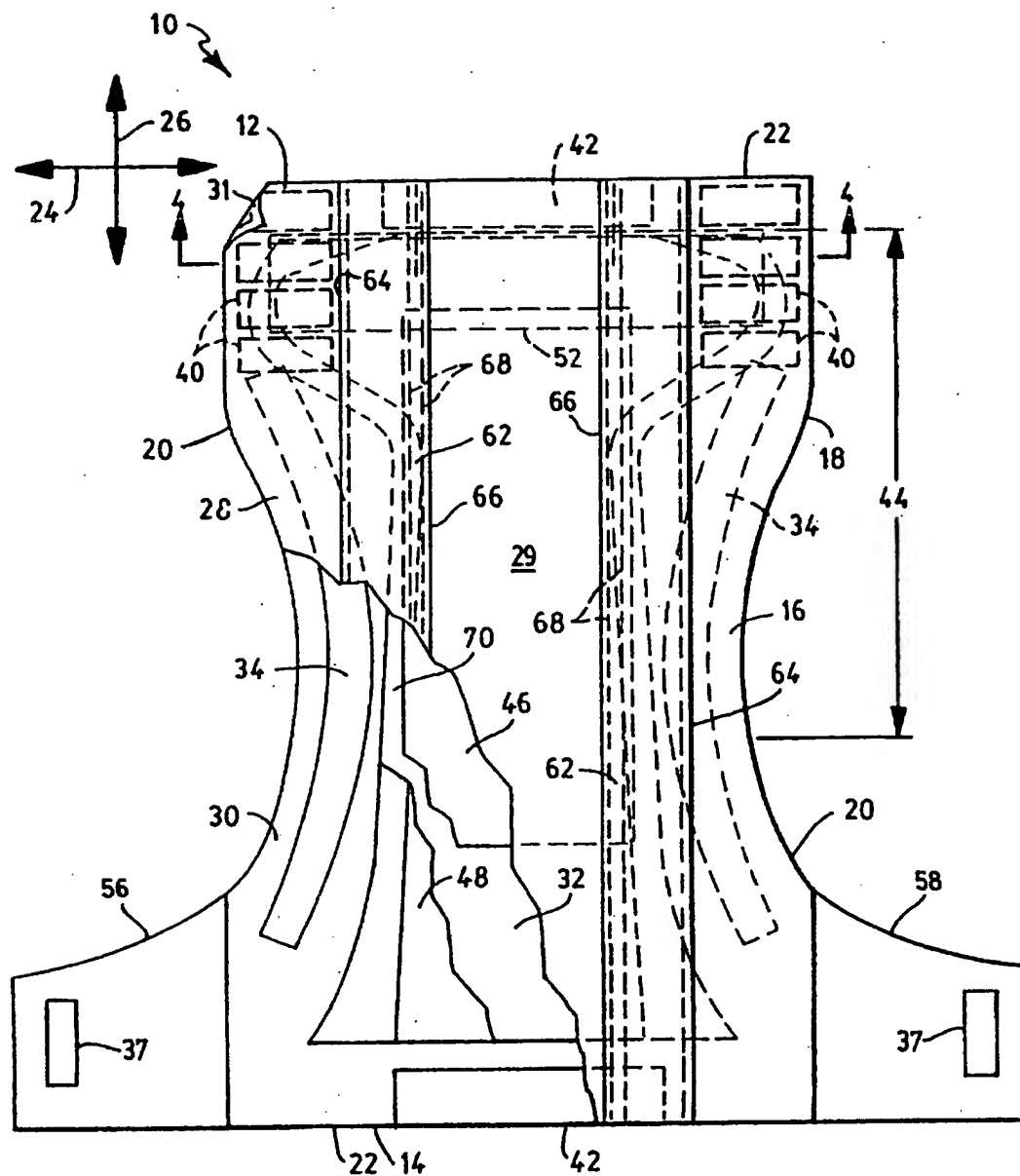


FIG. 3

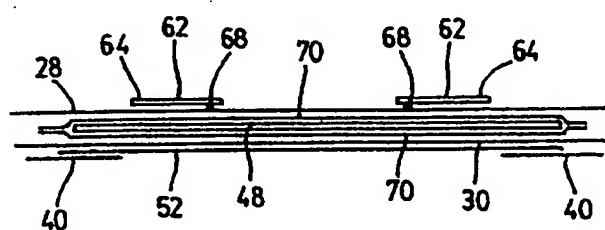


FIG. 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/US 96/19857

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6 A61F13/58

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 6 A61F

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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A	US 5 292 819 A (DIEHL CHARLES F ET AL) 8 March 1994	

☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

14 April 1997

Date of mailing of the international search report

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Name and mailing address of the ISA

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl,
Fax (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Sánchez y Sánchez, J

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Inter-
national Application No
PCT/US 96/19857

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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